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SUBJECT: NEW KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER H.D. KUMARASWAMY

REF: CHENNAI 0163

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Haradanahally Deve Kumaraswamy (age 46), a former film producer and the son of former Indian Prime Minister Deve Gowda, became the new Chief Minister of the south Indian state of Karnataka on February 3, ¶2006. Kumaraswamy, who led a defection of Janata Dal (Secular) (JD(S)) assembly members causing the former government of Congress Party's Dahram Singh to fall, has little experience outside of his native Karnataka. Among his first acts as Chief Minister has been the wooing of the large Bangalore-based knowledge industry in a bid to secure their support, which he sees as critical for his survival. This message provides biographic information on Kumaraswamy. END SUMMARY

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN MEETING KUMARASWAMY

¶2. (SBU) Kumaraswamy's English language skills are extremely limited. During Kumaraswamy's visit to Consulate Chennai in June 2005 in connection with a visa application (he received a ten-year validity tourist visa but then cancelled a scheduled trip to the U.S. to attend to political matters), Poloff's attempted conversation with him was limited to very short questions and even shorter responses. His demeanor seemed sullen and uncommunicative, but that may be a result of his uncertainty with the English language. Press reports quote him as saying, "I want to learn spoken English." Often dressed in homespun cotton shirts and light trousers, he comes across as a person who prefers to remain in the shadows. That is where he remained during the time his father and former Indian Prime Minister Deve Gowda served in office.

HORIZON LIMITED TO KARNATAKA

¶3. (SBU) Educated entirely in Karnataka, Kumaraswamy attended the Saint Joseph School in Hassan, where he is remembered for playing hooky, often spending time in the local cinema watching his favorite movies. His college education was entirely in Bangalore. Despite faring poorly academically, he received his Bachelor of Science degree from National College, Bangalore in the late 1970's.

¶4. (SBU) A short foray into the movie business saw him produce five local language movies that did well in the box office. He maintains his ties with the movie

industry and is the president of the Karnataka Cinema Theatre Owners Association. Kumaraswamy first came into the political limelight in 1996, after his father Deve Gowda secured a JD(S) constituency for him. He won the Kanakapura Lok Sabha seat in 1996, but lost it two years later. In 1999 he stood for election to the state legislature from two constituencies but lost both. In state elections held in 2004, Kumaraswamy contested and won the Ramanagaram seat located in a rural district near Bangalore. In the same year he was made working President of the JD(S) after being denied a berth in the Congress-led state cabinet.

WIFE AND MOTHER HIS TWIN DRIVERS

¶5. (SBU) Married to Anita, who is known as a driving force behind his political career, Kumaraswamy has a son Nikhil who is currently pursuing his bachelor's degree in commerce at Jain College, Bangalore. Kumaraswamy is known to be very close to his mother, Chennamma, whose blessings he sought prior to taking office.

A SKILLFUL MANIPULATOR

¶6. (SBU) As working president of the JD(S), Kumaraswamy assiduously cultivated members of the Karnataka legislature belonging to his party. Exploiting their growing disenchantment with the party's coalition arrangement with Congress and their fears of reelection failure following his party's poor performance in local

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body elections, Kumaraswamy led a rebellion of 43 party members. Forming an alliance with the opposition BJP, he staged a coup and staked his claim to form the government. (Reftel).

PARTY OPPOSITION REMAINS

¶7. (SBU) The alliance with the BJP, however, has drawn considerable flak from the JD(S) party's national leadership. Kumaraswamy's father, Deve Gowda, was forced to resign as party president after his son's coup. With the top leadership of JD(S) calling for their expulsion from the party, Kumaraswamy and his fellow rebels face the prospect of precipitating the dissolution of the state legislature.

KUMARASWAMY WOOS THE KNOWLEDGE INDUSTRY

¶8. COMMENT: Generally perceived as being an enemy of Bangalore's burgeoning information technology industry in favor of a more pro-rural stance, Kumaraswamy has taken pains to allay IT industry fears. In his first press conference as Chief Minister, he assured investors and industry officials that their concerns about the deteriorating state of Bangalore's infrastructure would be addressed. One of his first acts as Chief Minister was to call upon the state bureaucracy to come up with a status report on pending infrastructure projects in the city. It is not clear whether this expressed concern for the IT industry and its infrastructure worries is based on conviction or political expediency. With his government precariously placed at the moment, his future may depend on whom Bangalore's knowledge industry backs. As Mr. Narayanamoorthy, Chief Mentor at Infosys, put it, "Its time for a fresh mandate." END COMMENT

